



To Whom it May Concern

by Holly Raber

I feel guilty, God knows, about all sorts of things, but not about what happened that night, the night you chose to leave. There will be those that judge me, those that question my motivation but only you and I will know the truth.

It has been a year now but those last days are still fresh in my mind. Awake in the uncertain depths of the night I turn over the hours and minutes, examine them and wonder if I would, given the choice, have acted differently. But as we both know, choice was never an option.

Friday night finds you lying in that incongruous hospital bed close to the French windows where your dining table should be. It's one of those close, damp August nights when it feels like someone has left the central heating on, in the moonlit garden beyond even nature is holding her breath. So we watch and we wait, your daughters and I, death like birth, it seems is a peculiarly intimate and female preserve.

For several days now you have been so quiet and still as you visit the empty rooms in your head drawing the curtains, closing the doors, taking your leave.

The dust sheets have been draped, lights turned out and secrets locked within. I sense your readiness, the exhaustion that now overwhelms you, I experience a moment of fear, distaste, my resolve slips away but I know I must, I will, honour your wishes.

Chamomile tea, distilled daisies, in your favourite chipped china mug from Polzeath, the summer Francesca learnt to swim. Honey from the bees at Petersham where you met your beloved Eddie, to hide the bitter taste. Our eyes meet as you drink deeply from that poisoned chalice your strength of will confounds me.

Death, midwife of the underworld stalks briskly into the room, surveys the scene. With a practised hand she steals your breath, closes your eyes and loosens your grip on the world. Her work is swift and brutal. In the stillness that remains your absence is the most vivid presence in the room.